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ALSACE AND LORRAINE





SOME FACTS ABOUT

ALSACE AND LORRAINE

A PAPER READ BEFORE

THE

GEOGRAPHICAL CLUB OF PHILADELPHIA

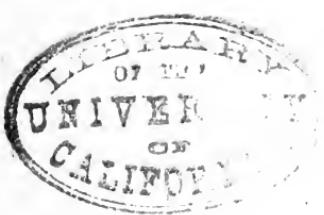
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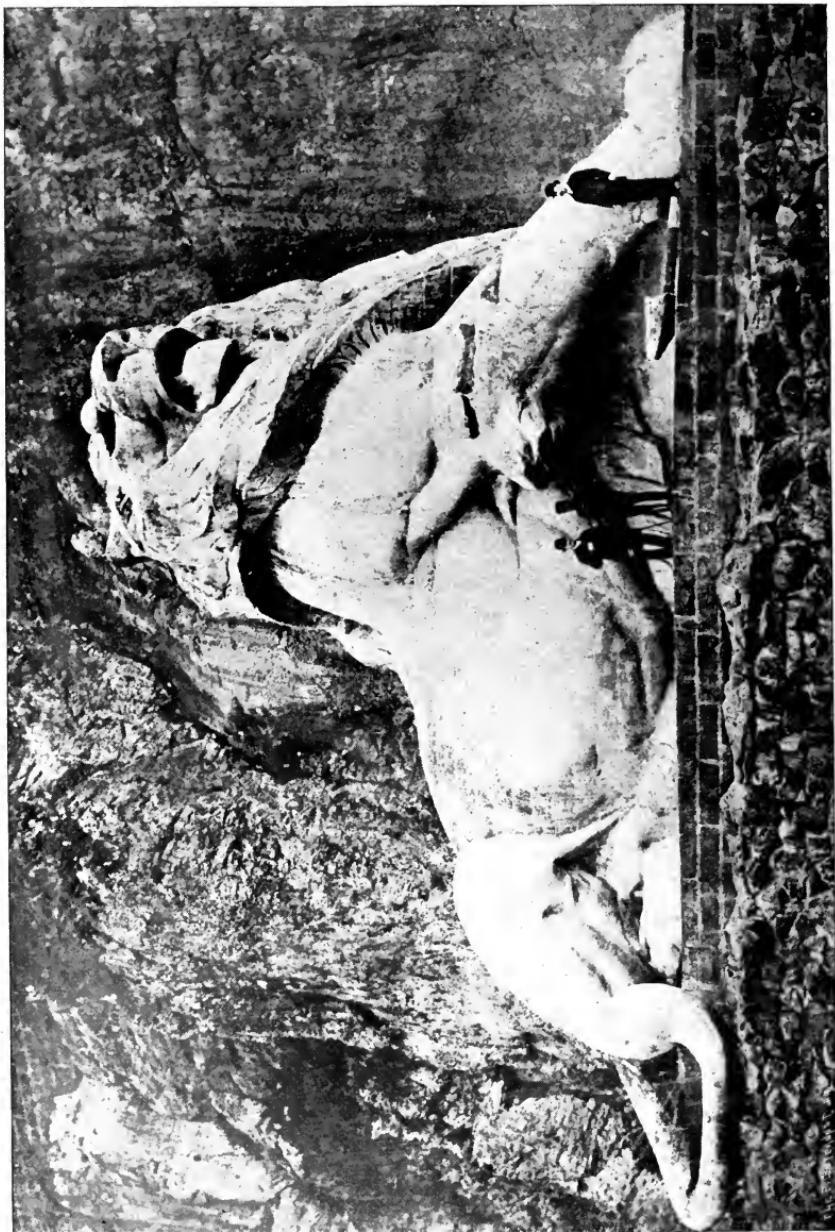


THOMAS WILLING BALCH.

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“AUX DÉFENSEURS DE BELFORT--1870-71.”

BULLETIN
OF THE
GEOGRAPHICAL CLUB
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VOL. I

MARCH, 1895

NO. 4

SOME FACTS ABOUT ALSACE AND LORRAINE.¹

THOMAS WILLING BALCH, A. B., HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

(Read before the Geographical Club, January 2, 1895.)

Of international questions that at present threaten the peace and prosperity of a large portion of the world, one of the most interesting and important is that of Alsace and Lorraine. For, as we look along the corridors of the history of those fair provinces, we see many of the great sovereigns, generals, statesmen and conquerors of the world pass to and fro before us. Every one who has read "De Bello Gallico" knows of Cæsar and his bridge across the Rhine. Of other great men connected with Alsace and Lorraine we easily evoke from the pictures in our memory Charles the Fifth, Richelieu, Louis the Fourteenth and Turenne, Von Moltke and Bismarck. And for us Anglo-Saxons it is worth noting that it was along the line of the Vosges Mountains that the advance of Roman customs and of the Latin tongue was checked. Some one has said that "The retention by Germany of Alsace and Lorraine is the one obstacle to the per-

¹ Copyright, 1895, by T. W. Balch.

manent peace of Europe." This seems an extravagant statement, but certain it is that this question influences every move on the chess-board of European politics, and many of them—such as the formation of the Triple Alliance and the Cronstadt demonstration—are direct outcomes of it.

In October of 1890 I passed through the *Reichsland*². The impression that I had formed of the country and its inhabitants was, that it was a land originally peopled by Germans that France had annexed, piece by piece, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I knew that the Alsacians in the course of several generations had become so attached to their new fatherland—~~France~~ especially on account of the facilities for freer trade, and the greater freedom of the individual, which, with the rest of the French, they obtained by the Revolution of 1789—that they protested in 1871 against the annexation of their country by the Germans. But I had also always heard that the Germans annexed Alsace and Lorraine on the theory expressed in one of their war songs:

"Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?
So nenne endlich mir das Land!
So weit die Deutsche Zunge klingt
Und Gott in Himmel Lieder singt!
Das soll es sein!
Das, wacker Deutscher, nenne dein!"³

In other words, so long as there were German-speaking people under foreign rule, Barbarossa's beard had not yet grown seven times round the stone table in the Knyphäuser. I was also under the impression that Alsace and Lorraine had been part of the Holy Roman Empire, and that several of the cities besides Strasbourg had been free cities of the Empire. I believed then,

²This is the official name given by the Germans to the annexed provinces and means "Land of the Empire."

³"Des Deutschen Vaterland." The words were written in 1813 by Ernst Moritz Arndt and the music in 1825 by Gustav Reichardt.

that France's only claim to Alsace and Lorraine was that she had held them so long that the people had become in the course of time Gallicized so completely that, though they still spoke the ancient tongue of their German ancestors, along with that of their new country, they had by 1870 become completely French at heart.

Accordingly, as I journeyed from Bâle to Strasbourg, I was not surprised at what I heard and saw. At the stations and in the car I heard German; everywhere I saw German names and German signs. At Mulhouse a number of people got in, and three or four of them, a soldier among the number, exchanged remarks about the weather, the state of the crops, *et cetera*. The conversation lapsed. One of these men, who had been talking, and sat immediately opposite to the soldier, pulled out a newspaper, *Le Petit Journal* of Paris. Here, then, was a man to all appearances a German, who spoke to his fellow-passengers in German, reading a newspaper published on the other side of the Vosges. At the station before reaching Strasbourg all these travelers got out, and a new set took their place. The newcomers were four—a father, a mother, a girl of about sixteen and a small child of three or four. They appeared, like all the others, to be German. The three older members spoke to one another in German, but whenever they addressed a word to the little child, they always spoke in French. It seemed that as they knew two languages, they wished, like sensible people, to teach them both to their children. But when the conductor put in his head at the window and asked in German for their tickets, they at once spoke to him in French, and made him answer them in the same language. At the station in Strasbourg all the railroad employés were busy talking German. There was a poor woman at a news-stand reading to her child out of a book. A German officer asked her in German for the *Kölnischer Zeitung*. She answered in the same language, and sold him the paper. She had on her table a large pile of

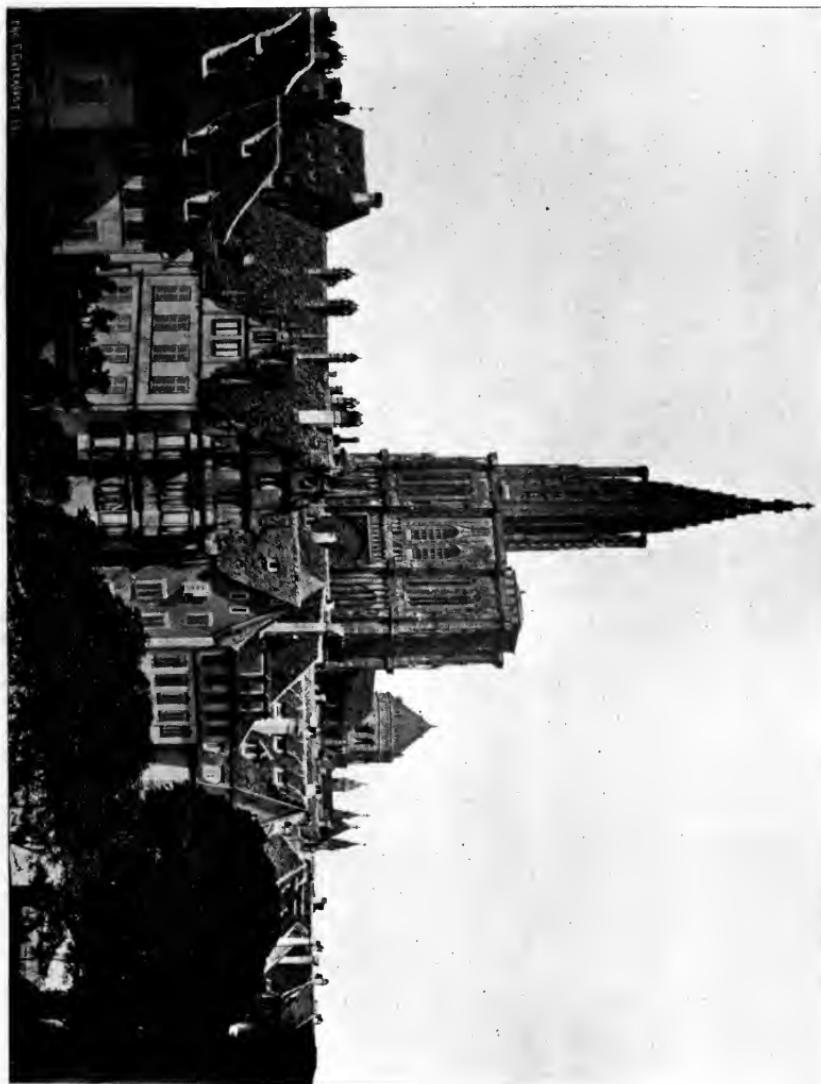
Le Petit Journal, but what was more interesting was that as she opened her book again she read to her small boy in French. The cab driver, too, who drove me to the Pariserhof, took pains to speak in French. At the hotel the employés were all Germans by birth, and when I spoke to them in their own language, much to my astonishment, they did not once try to speak to me in English, to show me, according to the custom of European waiters, how much better they could speak my own tongue than I could theirs. On the contrary, they seemed anxious to speak in German, as if to emphasize their nationality. The next day, walking about the town, on every side I saw German names—such as Schneider and Holzmann. But in many ways it was easy to see that at heart the Strasbourgers were French. For instance, in the window of a grocery store on the Broglieplatz⁴—all display of French flags is rigorously forbidden in the Reichsland—the store-keeper, whose name on his sign was thoroughly German, had put in a conspicuous place some white candles, between two packages of red ones, wrapped at the bottom in blue paper. It was indeed a dull man who did not see at once the tri-color.

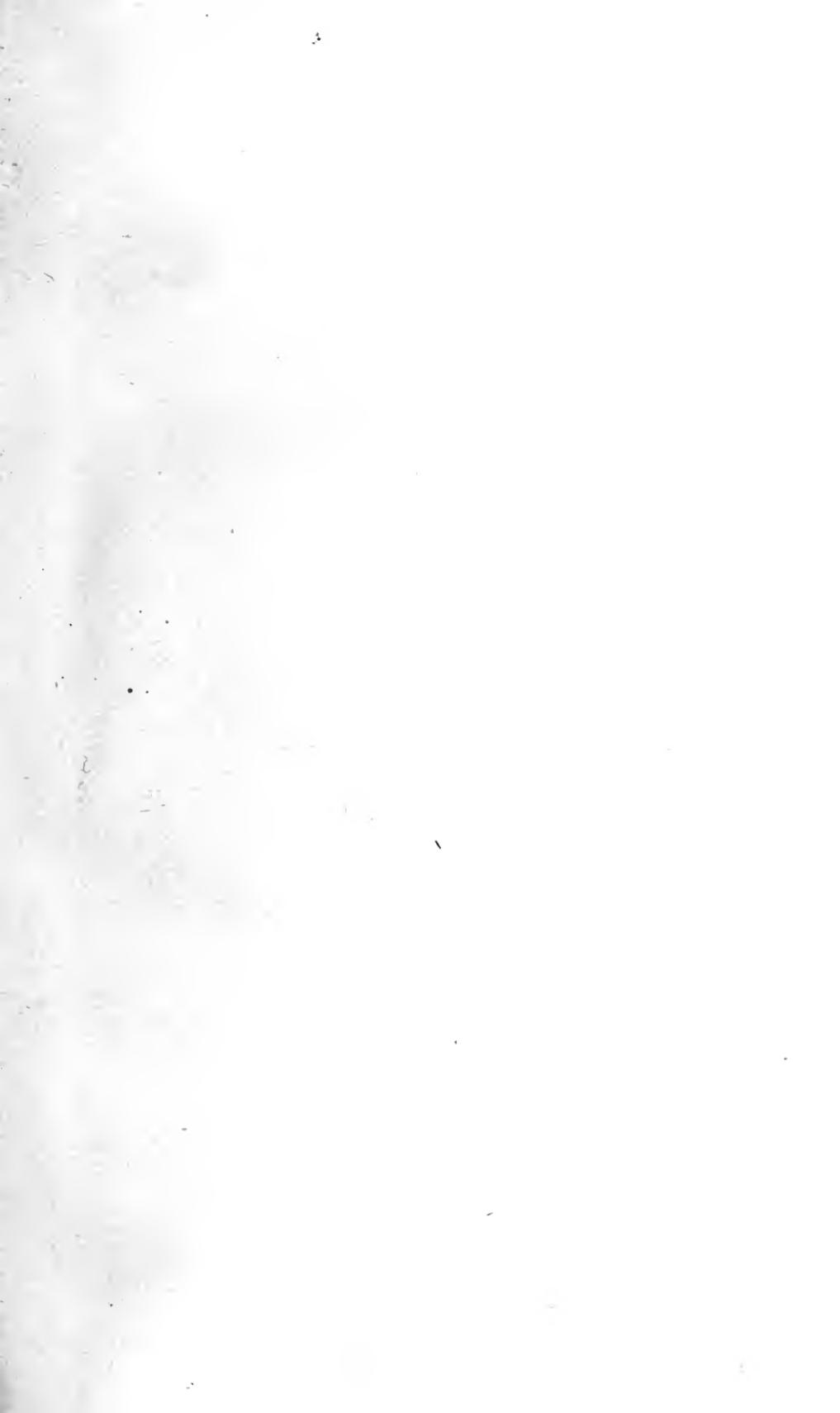
Strasbourg has two monuments that have an international fame: the tomb of Marshal Saxe and the cathedral. The monument erected to the memory of the great marshal of Louis the Fifteenth is in the Evangelical Church of St. Thomas. It is made of white marble, and shows Death beckoning Maurice of Saxe into the tomb, while France is vainly trying to hold him back, and around him are allegorical figures representing the countries whose armies he had defeated. There is nothing in the church that can challenge comparison with the tomb in any sense and divert your attention from it, and, probably because it is quite alone, it appears to be finer than anything in Westminster Abbey.

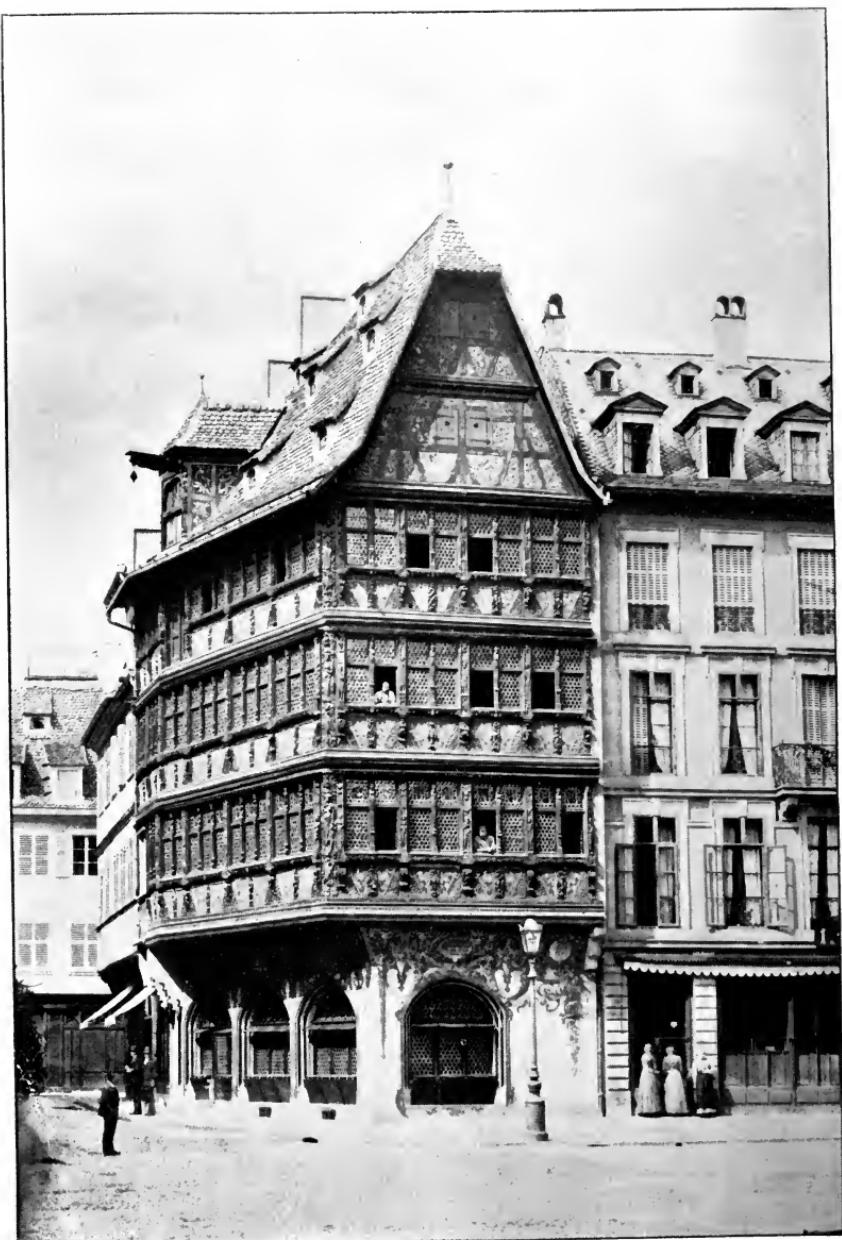
The famous Cathedral of Strasbourg stands in the middle of

⁴ Named after a French marshal.

CATHEDRAL OF STRASBOURG.







OLD HOUSE--STRASBOURG.

the town. It is built in part in the German Romanesque, such as we see along the Rhine, as at Speyer and Worms; and the remainder is built in the Gothic style, showing German characteristics. Thus this great edifice, distinctly a German building in its lines and decorations, dating from 1179 to 1439, is additional evidence to prove that the Alsacians are of German origin. From the top of the cathedral tower you have a far-reaching view. All along the west you see the blue slopes of the Vosges running north and south, which divide the country off from France; and parallel to them, but a little to the east of Strasbourg, that great artery of commerce, the Rhine, which commercially links Alsace with Germany. Between the mountains and the river lies the plain of Alsace. Beyond the Rhine, far to the east, lies the Black Forest. Looking out from the steeple over the city, I was struck with its resemblance to Nuremberg, as the city of Albrecht Dürer appears from the tower of the castle where the ancestors of the Hohenzollerns used to hold their sway. The color of the roofs, the style of construction of the houses of old Strasbourg, were almost identical with those of the city of the Meistersingers. My guide, as he pointed out to me the objects of interest, spoke in German, and, like every one I had seen, he looked German. By and by, when I could not quite understand something he was explaining, he said: "Perhaps you can understand French better?" "Yes," I answered. That was the end of German. He at once rattled away in French. I asked him whether he was a German or a Frenchman. "I am an Alsacian," he answered. But as he was describing the bombardment of Strasbourg and pointing out where the German batteries stood, and telling how bravely General Uhrich resisted, just after saying the Germans were many tens of thousand strong, he unconsciously disclosed his national feeling by the expression, "But *we*, militia, police and all, were but seventeen thousand." He then told me how only German was

taught in the schools, and how all the well-to-do French had left for France.

The Germans have made of Strasbourg a great intrenched camp, with outlying forts. They are doing everything they can in the way of adding to the importance and prosperity of Strasbourg—as, for example, building an imperial palace, constructing new bridges, laying out handsome streets in the unbuilt quarter, rehabilitating the ancient University—to reconcile the inhabitants to their new nationality. In 1890 there was no apparent sign to show that the Alsacians were in the least reconciled to their present position. To see a people speaking among themselves the language of their fathers and yet bitterly opposing by all the means in their power the attempt to join them once more with that nation of whom, geographically and ethnologically, they naturally form a part, seems very strange.

“ *Dis-moi quel est ton pays :
Est-ce la France ou l’Allemagne ?
C’est un pays de plaine et de montagne,
Que les vieux Gaulois ont conquis
Deux mille ans avant Charlemagne,
Et que l’étranger nous a pris !
C’est la vieille terre française
De Kléber, de la *Marseillaise*!*” ⁵

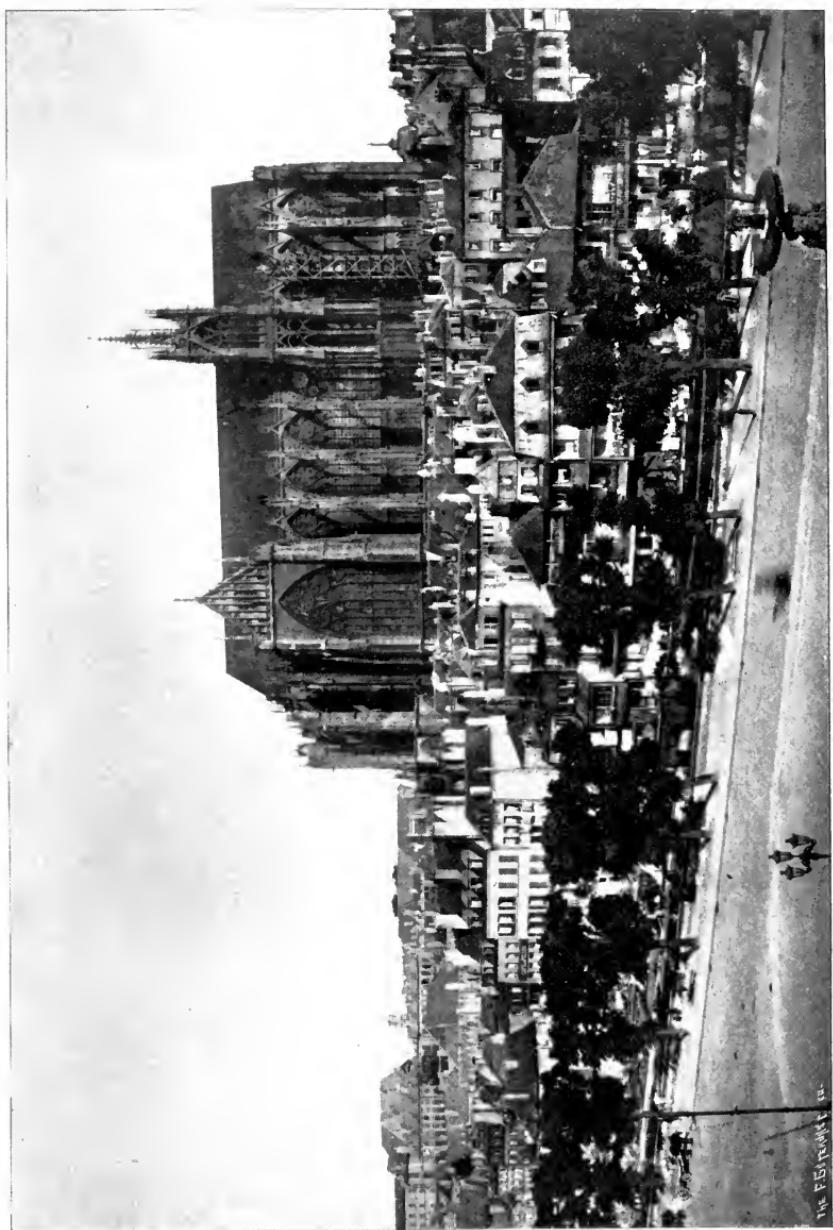
It is only the greater freedom, both commercial and individual, that the Alsacians gained by the French Revolution, that appears to explain their attachment to France and resistance to Germany.

The railroad from Strasbourg to Metz crossed the Vosges. Outside of the land of the snow mountains I have seldom taken a more beautiful railroad ride. The mountains were not high, but the autumn coloring of the forests was charming, and the works of man were in keeping with the beauties of nature. Now

⁵ *Erckmann-Chatrian.*

and then there were the ruins of a feudal castle on some commanding hilltop. The railroad, part of the time, passed close to a canal that connects the Rhine with the Marne. In that land, where you could almost smell the preparation for war in the air, man was not unmindful of the economic laws of nature that govern the rainfall and the depths of the streams. Not only were the forests cut and replanted according to the most scientific knowledge, but, along the roadsides and the banks of the canal, trees were planted, affording shelter to both man and beast against the summer sun. You passed by the station at which you take the train for Phalsbourg, the town made so famous by Erckmann-Chatrian's stories of the great Revolution and the Napoleonic epic. That union of two authors, one with a German, and the other with a French, name, was a hint of the difference between the two provinces. For from there on, as the train moved out from the Vosges Mountains into the plain of Lorraine, there was a complete change in the appearance of the people. You no longer saw Germans, but Frenchmen; and in the villages through which the train passed, the German names had given place to French ones. At the station at Metz the employés were German; but as soon as you crossed the old fortifications of Vauban, the great military engineer of the wars of Louis the Fourteenth and Marlborough, you heard French on all sides, saw French men and women, and saw French names, such as Antoine and Jacques. The houses, too, looked very different, both in their lines and their coloring, from those of Strasbourg. The names of the streets were posted up in both languages. For instance, you read "Königsplatz," and immediately under it you saw "Place Royale." So, too, with all official announcements. On the right hand you read the word, "Notiz," with the text underneath in the old Gothic characters, while alongside there was an "Avis," with the text below in French. It was hardly worth while

to ask the reason for this use of French; it was easy to see that while a German race inhabited Strasbourg, a French people lived in Metz. At the hotel, too—Grand Hôtel de Metz—you noticed a great difference from the Pariserhof of Strasbourg. The proprietor was a Latin, not a Teuton, and, excepting the waiters in the dining-room, the employés were French. There is on the Esplanade a monument to the most famous of Napoleon's marshals—Ney. Near the cathedral, on the Place d'Armes, there stands an old statue of Marshal Fabert, Governor of Metz in the time of Charles the Fifth. There is a fine cathedral at Metz. It is, I think, more imposing and graceful than that of Strasbourg. It is totally different from any church in Germany. It was begun in the thirteenth century and finished in the sixteenth, and belongs to the decadence of the Gothic style. Without being as fine, it is distinctly in the Gothic style that prevailed in the Ile de France and adjoining provinces. The difference between the cathedrals of Strasbourg and Metz is one of the best illustrations of the difference of the people in the two provinces. For, during the Middle Ages, men of one nation could not build as those of another; Germans could not build as Frenchmen, nor Frenchmen as Germans. Not only that, but even the men of one century could not build in the same style that their countrymen worked in a hundred or a hundred and fifty years before them. The architecture of Europe, from the year one thousand to the Renaissance, first developed into what was known in England as the Norman style, and on the continent as the Romanesque. That was followed by the Pointed style in England, and the Gothic in the continental countries, the best and noblest development of which was in the free communes of the north of France. Indeed, I believe, that, barring Englishmen, most people are agreed that the great Gothic churches of Amiens, Reims, Paris, Chartres and Beauvais are the finest structures that have been built since the era when the Greeks built



CATHEDRAL OF METZ.

THE FIFTH PLATE

the Parthenon. But, until well towards the Renaissance, whatever the style, the work of a race is clearly shown in the mode of construction; nay, even the people of a shire or province showed in their work their local characteristics. The difference between the cathedrals of Strasbourg and Metz—one of German construction, the other of French—is a strong proof, I think, of the original difference in the nationality of the two provinces.

There is only one thing to show that the southwestern half of the part of Lorraine that the Germans annexed in 1871 is historically a German land; it is the name of its chief town—Metz. That is a German name; but as it is surrounded on all sides by villages with French names, and the district around it is known to the inhabitants as “le pays Messin,” and every other thing about the town, except the garrison, and the Germans who have settled there since the war, are French, it would seem to be a Teutonic name that has straggled across into the land of the Latins, just as you find along all frontier lines a mingling of names.⁶

Indeed, the only claim that Lorraine was originally a German land that the French annexed and then Gallicized, is, that Lorraine came, in one way or another, probably through the marriages of some kings or princes with the heiresses of the Dukes of Lorraine, to be, according to the rules of the feudal law, a part of the Empire. If you will sail down the Rhone from Lyons to the sea, you can hear the people speak of the right bank as the “Royaume” and the left as the “Empire.” Those terms have come down from the time when the right bank belonged to the Kings of France, and the left to the Holy Roman Empire. Yet no one would say that the people of the left bank were not Frenchmen simply because their land, some centuries ago, had

⁶ *Illustrierte Kriegs-Chronik: Gedenkbuch an den Deutsch-Französischen Feldzug von 1870-1871*, Leipzig, 1871, pp. 43, 47; *Précis de la Révolution Française*, par J. Michelet; Paris, C. Marpon et E. Flammarion. Map entitled “La France sous La Révolution”; *Atlas de Géographie Historique*; Paris 1894, Hachette et Cie., Carte No. 46, “Limite des langues en Alsace-Lorraine, d'après Pfister.”

formed part of that conglomeration of nations—the Holy Roman Empire, of which Voltaire said that “it was neither Holy, Roman nor an Empire.”

The environs of Metz are interesting. It is surrounded by a number of high hills on which there are strong forts. You are allowed to drive about in parts of this enclosure, but if you should happen to go too near the forts without a permission card, you would probably spend the next night in prison, and what would then happen it is difficult to know. Indeed, at table d'hôte, I heard German commercial travelers say that, without a permission card, they would not dare walk in the country about Metz, even at a great distance from any of the forts. One of the places that you are allowed to see is the house where Marshal Bazaine had his headquarters during the war of 1870-71. It is a country house a mile or two outside the town, prettily situated among some trees at the foot of one of the high, fort-crowned hills. Near Bazaine's headquarters, I saw a sergeant teaching some raw recruits to fire from behind trees, and the way they did their work was truly wonderful. The sergeant went from one man to another, showing each one the proper position for loading and firing. But no sooner did he move on to the next man than the recruit he had just left would get out of position and assume some grotesque attitude, suggesting that he was trying to break the tree, or perhaps that he had cramp in his leg.

From the top of the Cathedral of Metz you have a more restricted view than from that of Strasbourg. The country is much more hilly. Metz itself is in a level valley, with high hills around it that command the surrounding country, the fertile “pays Messin,” as the inhabitants call it. To the west you see the village of Mars-la-Tour and the Chaussée of Gravelotte, where two great battles were fought in August, 1870; and to the south . . . Pont-à-Mousson, which is the first French station on the road to Paris. The man whom I found at the top of the

tower, where the Germans have a signal post, when he learnt that I was an American, said : "Ah, yes, we are idiots in this part of the world ; we fight while you Americans get our money." His remark reminded me of the famous telegram that King William of Prussia was said to have sent after the battle of Gravelotte to Queen Augusta :

"By the will of Heaven, my dear Augusta,
We've had another awful buster ;
Ten thousand Frenchmen sent below,
Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

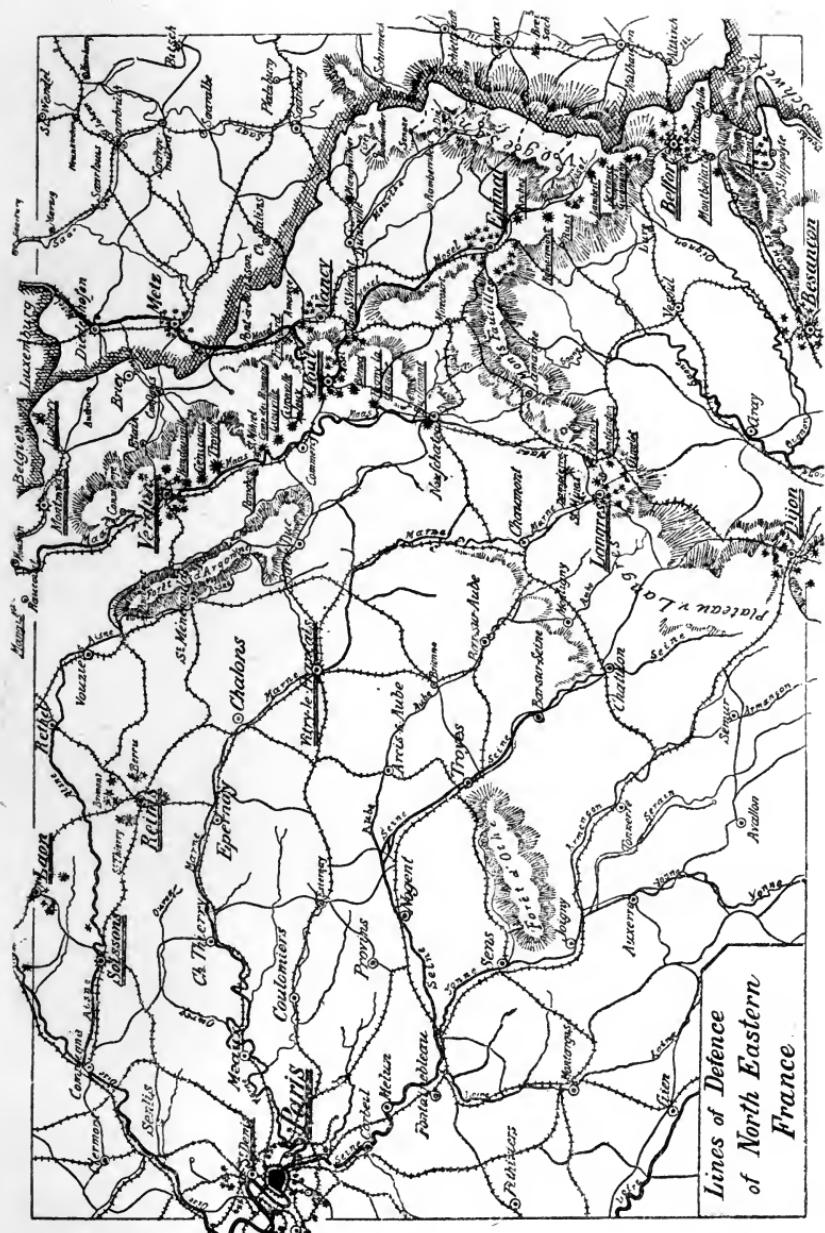
You can observe very clearly from the tower of the Cathedral of Strasbourg how the town started and slowly developed to its present size. You see that Strasbourg was originally built on an island formed by the Ill separating into two channels. The arms of the river were a natural defense for the inhabitants and as each channel was narrower than the united streams, it was easier to cross from bank to bank. In consequence, Strasbourg became a port on the line of commerce as it moved up and down the neighboring Rhine. Then you can see some remnants of the old walls and towers of the Middle Ages, which the Strasbourgers built when they extended their city to both sides of the Ill. Again, further away, there are parts of the fortifications of Vauban, which made Strasbourg one of the strong places of France in the time of the Old Régime. Much further out you see the modern *enceinte* that the Germans have built, and in the far distance, on both sides of the Rhine, the detached forts, without which no place is now considered a citadel of the first class.

Metz expanded in much the same way. It was built on a group of small islands in the Moselle, and became a mile-stone on the road from France to Germany and gradually expanded as it grew, first in commercial, then in strategic, importance. Some of its old mediæval fortifications still remain. The Porte des Allemands, a castellated gate of the middle of the fifteenth cen-

tury, still stands as firm as when Charles the Fifth invested the town in mid-winter.

For another war the Germans have prepared their plans for an aggressive campaign against France. The only places they have fortified on a great scale are Strasbourg and Metz. The former is an intrenched camp, and to-day, owing to the high hills crowned with strong forts that encircle the latter town and dominate the "pays Messin," Metz, along with Belfort, is now, next to Paris, the strongest fortress in the world. All other fortifications in the Reichsland the Germans have dismantled. Their idea is to mobilize and advance their forces so quickly that the French will not have time to attack. Behind the Reichsland there is a strong line of great fortresses running from Cologne in the north to Ulm in the south, which would serve as a line of defense in case the Germans were beaten back across the Rhine.

The French, on the contrary, have placed great reliance on fortifications. The frontier line that was agreed to by the treaty of Frankfort gave the Germans a decided strategic advantage. Metz in the hands of France was a great bulwark of defense on her northeastern frontier, and in Strasbourg she held the key that opened the door for an attack across the Rhine. But to-day, Strasbourg, with the line of the Vosges Mountains, affords to Germany ample protection against a French attack, and, with Metz in her hands facing the open plains of Lorraine, she holds, as it were, a sword in the side of France. Near to Switzerland, the French have in Belfort a place naturally of great strength. It guards the natural highway from France into Germany, between the Vosges and the Jura Mountains, known as *la Trouée de Belfort*. But from there to the Belgian frontier they have had to build up an artificial line of defense. Epinal, Toul and Verdun they have turned into fortresses of the first class. Then, to strengthen the line between these four towns, they have built a chain of small forts. These citadels are placed at such a distance



Lines of Defence
of North Eastern
France



that, except in the country from Verdun to the Belgian frontier, and the few miles between Epinal and Toul, an army attempting to enter France from Germany must pass under the fire of one or two forts. To the north of Verdun there are no forts and between Epinal and Toul there is a break in the chain of defense; but behind that opening the French have built a great intrenched camp at Neufchâteau; and it is generally supposed that they have left these gaps as traps for the Germans to enter. The second French line of defense consists of the fortresses of Besançon, Dijon and Langres to the south, and Laon, Soissons and Reims to the north. Again, back of that, Lyons, Paris and Lille form a third line.

Military men have argued that both combatants are so strongly posted along the Alsace-Lorraine frontier that it will be almost impossible for either side to make a direct advance, and that one or the other might be tempted to make a flank attack either through Switzerland or Belgium. On the Swiss side the Jura Mountains, covered with Swiss sharpshooters, will make it difficult to turn either line from the south. Belgium, however, is not so well protected by nature as the small Federal Republic, but she has fortified a number of important points. As an attack through either of these neutral powers would at once bring its army into the field, it is likely that neither France nor Germany will molest them.

It has once or twice been mooted that the difficulty might be amicably settled by Germany returning the Reichsland, or even only Metz and French-speaking Lorraine, to France, who in return would give hard cash or some of her colonial possessions, or both. Admirably suited as this question is for argument before an International Court of Arbitration, the talk of France buying back the whole or even a part of Alsace and Lorraine, except at the point of the bayonet, seems but an "iridescent dream."

The Alabama and the Behring Sea cases were radically dif-

ferent from this one. In both those disputes the claims were rather private than national in their character; that is to say, they were not of such a sort that the national position and prestige and power of either of the two litigants were involved. In neither of those cases was the possession of territory at issue, nor were those disputes legacies left by bloody and bitter wars between the litigants. In this case, however, the possession of Alsace and Lorraine, with their rich mineral deposits and the strong strategic positions of Strasbourg and Metz, gives their possessor an immense advantage in resources and position for any future war.

The French view of the question is best summed up in a phrase of Gambetta: "*Ma seule ambition est d'avoir ma statue à Strasbourg.*" The French will be satisfied, for some time at least, with nothing less than the recovery of both provinces. They are not likely to forget soon the land of Kléber and Kellermann, nor that it was at Strasbourg that Rouget de l'Isle wrote the "*Marseillaise.*"

The only thing that would induce the Germans to return the whole or a part of the annexed provinces in order to pacify the French, is the fear of that powerful people that has extended its sway from the Baltic to the Pacific, from the Arctic Sea to the Hindoo Koosh. And they have good reason to fear that race, for all the signs by which we can judge such movements of race expansion as those that have gone on for centuries within the Empire of the Tzars, show that, in all probability, together with the Anglo-Saxons, the Latins, and some of the Orientals, the Russians are destined to divide the world.

The Germans will never peacefully give up Alsace and Strasbourg, as they are necessary for their security. For, as Bismarck said in the Reichstag, with Strasbourg in the possession of France, a door was wide open for a French attack across

the Rhine.⁷ Metz and Lorraine the Germans annexed, expressly because Metz was so placed that it laid bare the French frontier. It is not probable, now that they have thoroughly aroused the hatred of the French against themselves, that the Germans will weaken their present frontier because the inhabitants of half of the part of Lorraine that they annexed are of French origin, especially as they did not consider the feelings of the people of Lorraine, but their own interests, when they took that province. It was the intensity of German national feeling that rallied the South German States to the aid of Prussia, and subsequently demanded for their protection the annexation of Alsace and Strasbourg and part of Lorraine.

There are other forces at work, however, which each day make it more certain that the *status quo* will be maintained. One is the enormous present cost of war, which is each year becoming greater. Another is the disproportion in the population between Germany and France that is increasing every day. The reason why Germany so quickly and completely defeated France in 1870, was, that Prussia, under the skillful leadership of Bismarck and Von Moltke, was thoroughly prepared for that war, while France was utterly disorganized. The French, owing to their total lack of organization, in vain tried to advance their forces to invade Germany; and it was not until after the proclamation of the Republic that the French were able to show that they still could fight. In 1870 the Germans were only slightly superior in numbers, but to-day the difference in their favor has largely increased, and is likely to increase still more, and we may remember the dictum of the greatest general of modern times: "*Dieu est avec les gros battalions.*"

A great number of French left Alsace soon after the war, while many Germans settled there, and this movement still goes on. For example, Belfort, which before the Franco-German

⁷ Bismarck's speech of the 2d of May, 1871.

war was a town of about seven thousand people, now numbers over twenty thousand inhabitants, most of the newcomers having lived before the war in Mulhouse. As they left, their place was filled by Germans. But it is not only in the Reichsland that Germany has all the best of this movement of races. At the beginning of the Franco-German war France had thirty-eight millions inhabitants and Germany forty-two. Since then the French, unlike their hardy and determined cousins on the banks of the Saint Lawrence, have failed to increase, while the Germans have gained in numbers until they now number six millions more than they did in 1870. If this increase on the part of Germany continues for a few years more, it will settle the question, as between her and France alone, irrevocably in her favor.





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